

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I remember the day I learned to love the United States. It was in the living room of my friend, a Congolese father of 12. I had asked him if he would tell me his story. It spanned two generations of highs and lows and more than one move across man-made borders for safety, leaving everything behind and starting over. They finally fled to a refugee camp in a neighboring country.

After years of waiting and about 18 months of paperwork and tests and questions, they came to the United States. From my settled middle-class eyes looking in, those first three years were really, really hard for them. I wondered if they regretted coming to this country. The last question I asked that evening went something like, "Do you like living in the U.S.?" His lightning fast response was that he loved the United States. Why? His family was safe here. That was it.

Why do I now love my country in a way I never did before? Because an immigrant showed me a new understanding of safe.

My life is currently filled with friends from Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Congo, Tanzania, Burundi, and Sudan. Each of these friends have arrived at some point in the last eight years with nothing. The majority of them work in menial jobs no one else wants like laundry facilities, hotel housekeeping, sewing, and chicken farms. They get paid little and they save those pennies. With that money they are growing gardens and starting businesses. I cannot count how many of them now own homes. Almost every home I enter proudly displays an American flag in the living room. Again, I have lost count of how many of them have become citizens, overcoming major language barriers to answer the questions about our country so that they can say, "I am an American."

They come because they want to be safe. They are tired of war, and fighting, and hatred. They already know what that is like and they don't want any part of it. They want to be an active participant in a country where they can marry, raise children, go to the store, and attend community events peacefully. They are the walking wounded, victims of war, division and greed AND they are simply people like me looking for a quiet, safe place to live and love. They are my friends, my neighbors, my fellow Americans.

HCR 28 tells my friends that they are not welcome here--that we are no longer a safe country. They have already endured enough. They are already screened and vetted and checked. My refugee friends have taught me to honor and love my country because it is a safe place for all people, because we welcome those who want to live and work alongside us in peace. I urge you to continue to be welcoming and safe by voting against this resolution.

Thank you,

Joanna DeWolf
1307 Maycroft Rd.
Lansing, MI 48917